

## Introduction: Turn of the century innovations in language teaching

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It is typical of Australian university language departments that most staff are very much involved in teaching of undergraduate programs, although few of us have formal teaching training. Furthermore, although non-literature specialists (for example) are rarely called upon to teach literature, non-specialists in language pedagogy often teach language. In spite of a strong involvement in language teaching, and despite extensive experience of the classroom, we are not all specialists in language teaching research and therefore may not be fully aware of recent innovations in language teaching research and practice which might impact upon this field in which so many of us work. The motivation of this introduction and more generally of this special issue of *FULGOR* is, then, to present the main methodological developments that have occurred in language teaching in the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, focussing mainly on the teaching of the French language and this with a view firstly to promoting discussion of this changing terrain and secondly encouraging research in the field. Due to the space limitations of this paper, we will deal with two major areas where changes have occurred since the 1990s and indeed, are still occurring: the first is language teaching methodology, while the second concerns technology and its uses. We will briefly sum up theoretical and/or practical research in both areas before discussing the contributions that each article in this special issue makes to teaching within language programs.

### 1. The emergence of new approaches to language teaching since the development of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

#### 1.1 Historical and methodological overview

Researchers (mostly European) started developing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the 1970s and continued discussing the approach well into the 1980s (Breen & Candlin 1980; Coste *et al.* 1976; Moirand 1990; Savignon 1983; Wilkins 1976). Concurrently to its development, the approach has been introduced in many educational contexts. Even though not all teachers are fully aware of the underlying theories and methodological tenets of CLT, most of them claim (or used to claim until recently) to use the approach in the language classroom. Furthermore, most commercial teaching materials, such as for example the French textbook *Reflets* (Capelle & Gidon 1999:3) were or still are promoted using the catch-word “communication”. Theoretical research in language teaching has however moved on since the 1970s, leading to a reappraisal of CLT and in many cases to a renewal of language teaching methodology. From that research, three main approaches to the teaching of

French of interest to this article have emerged: intercomprehension, Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) and the action-oriented approach. We will briefly give an overview of these three approaches, first providing some reasons for their emergence together with an indication of their main methodological principles. In a second section we will discuss issues regarding the implementation of these approaches as well as practitioners' views of them.

### 1.1.1 Intercomprehension

The methodological principles of the intercomprehension approach have been widely discussed since the mid-1980s by researchers in European universities, in particular in southern Europe (Blanche-Benveniste and Valli at the University of Provence; Capucho at the Universidade Catolica Portuguesa in Lisbon; Simone at the University of Rome 3) but also in Germany (F. J. and C. Meissner at the University of Giessen). The approach has also been the theme of international conferences (for example the *Colloque international de didactique de l'intercompréhension*, Toulouse, 2008) as well as the topic of special issues in journals such as *Le français dans le monde* (1997) and *Les langues modernes* (2008).

In her article in the special issue of *Le français dans le monde*, Ploquin imagines an encounter in Europe between a French speaker and an Italian speaker (1997:46). In which language will the two interlocutors interact? Most likely they will communicate in English, which holds the status of *lingua franca* in Europe. There is however an alternative: the Francophone may speak French and understand her interlocutor's Italian; conversely the Italian may speak Italian and understand her interlocutor's French. Such a dialogue, in which both speakers use two different languages, is possible because French and Italian belong to the Romance language family and have linguistic similarities. Intercomprehension is then a "form of communication in which each person uses his or her own language and understands that of the other" (Doyé 2005:7).

This form of communication is encouraged by the European Education Council for socio-political reasons. Within such a context, the introduction of intercomprehension in education would help prepare European citizens for the crucial need of communication between interlocutors of the various European languages. The approach would be a more equitable solution to problems of communication than the use of English, as it would give a chance to all Europeans to speak their own language and thus preserve cultural and linguistic diversity.

To prepare European speakers for this special form of communication that may naturally occur outside of class, researchers have developed the intercomprehension method, the main objective of which is to teach receptive skills in two or more languages. Instead of teaching the four macro-skills in one language as is usually the case, the method aims at developing the ability to understand several languages at once. In other words, the approach rejects monolingualism (the study of one language) in the classroom in favour of plurilingualism (the simultaneous study of various languages) but with an emphasis on the development of written comprehension (Crochot 2008:26; Degache & Melo 2008:9). The languages of study are selected within the same family such as for example from the Romance languages (French, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, Romanian) or the Germanic languages (Dutch, English, German). While a focus on developing reading competence in several languages of the same group constitutes a distinctive characteristic of the approach, it does not however preclude the teaching of the other skills at a later stage. For some researchers, the favouring of comprehension is only temporary and there is the possibility of introducing the other skills later on. For example, Franz-Joseph Meissner recommends first focussing on written then on the oral comprehension of languages belonging to the same family, then working on their production before ending up with the development of

intercomprehension skills across languages belonging to different families (Meissner 2008:23).

The objective of developing receptive skills across languages implies a methodology that focuses on building up the strategic competence needed to understand new languages. In general, students must be trained to transfer previously acquired knowledge and skills to the comprehension of a new language (Crochot 2008:26; Meissner 2008:16). To facilitate that transfer the students may be helped to develop an awareness of the linguistic commonalities across languages of the same families. In Beacco and Byram's words, intercomprehension depends on

raising the awareness of what we already know but do not realise, our knowledge of how communication works, how human beings interact with each other, and then drawing on this to make "educated guesses" at the unknown (Beacco & Byram 2005:6).

The teaching of strategic competence entails raising awareness of similarities across languages as well as common features of human interaction with the view of using the information to "guess" the meaning of messages in unknown languages through recourse to inferential strategies.

### **1.1.2 Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT)**

The notion of "task" slowly emerged in research on language teaching methodology during the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (Brumfit 1984; Candlin 1987; Johnson 1979). To promote "communication" (the key word of CLT), researchers design communicative activities that aim at developing the ability to use language appropriately to the given social context of an interaction (Samuda & Bygate 2008:52). But methodologists grew dissatisfied with CLT teaching materials (Candlin 1987) that did not implement the theoretical principles of the approach as they had previously outlined them (Breen & Candlin 1980). For them, the implementation of CLT still fostered language knowledge rather than language use, just as had been the case in traditional approaches. Similarly to the grammar-translation method, the notional/functional syllabus devised in the 1970s from speech act theory (Coste *et al.* 1976; Wilkins 1976) was structured around a pre-selection of linguistic items, even though the language content was not made up of grammar elements but of functions (apologising, requesting, etc.). Such content still promoted knowledge rather than engaging learners in communication. Furthermore, the notional-functional syllabus, when introduced in the classroom, led to the implementation of a traditional teaching sequence labelled PPP. The sequence includes, first, a presentation phase (P) in which the learners are introduced to new linguistic items; second, a practice phase (P) where the learners practise the newly-introduced items, to end up with the third phase of production (P) in which they communicate freely in the second language. Since the notional-functional syllabus, (still organised around linguistic content, albeit containing units coming from new linguistic theories, and still mediated through PPP), did not meet the objectives of CLT researchers, the notion of "task" emerged as a means to base methodology not only on "linguistic knowledge" but also on the processes at play in the use of language for communication (Johnson 1979:198).

The emergence of TBLT is also linked to the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), which has been an important area of research in applied linguistics since the 1970s. SLA scholars have very much contributed to the conceptualisation and diffusion of TBLT for reasons other than those of methodologists. While the latter aim at consolidating CLT

principles, the former's goal is to build up teaching programs upon SLA theories (Long & Crookes 1992; Ellis 2003; Robinson 2001). For SLA researchers, the use of "linguistic syllabuses" (Ellis 2003:207), either grammatical or notional-functional, is not supported by current research in SLA. Such research posits and shows that linguistic forms are best acquired when learners are involved in the process of communicating meanings. Only a task-based syllabus can achieve that aim, whereas linguistic approaches of which the primary focus is on forms and which gradually introduce those forms interfere with the natural development of the acquisition process (Ellis 2003:208). This development occurs when learners' primary focus is on meaning – that is when the learners are engaged in the comprehension and production of meaningful texts and when they participate in interactions in which they negotiate meanings (Long & Crookes 1992:30-31). While a secondary focus in which the learners' attention is drawn to form is essential to acquisition it must take place *while* the learners are engaged in meaningful communication (Ellis 2003:208). SLA theoreticians, then, reject the traditional teaching of "forms" – or the teaching of forms extracted from their context of meaning – in favour of "focus-on-form instruction" that draws learners' attention to form when they are accomplishing meaningful tasks (Doughty & Williams 1998:4). Attention to form is achieved through the use of specific techniques, such as "recast", which consists of implicitly reformulating a learner's incorrect utterance into a correct one while s/he is performing a meaningful task.

But what is a task? Researchers in methodology and SLA alike have given many definitions. Even though there is no general agreement, the definitions have some points in common. We will start with Bygate, Skehan and Swain's definition "a task is an activity which requires learners to use the language with emphasis on meaning to attain an objective" (2001:11). For these scholars, a task is a learning activity that has two main characteristics. In Ellis's words, it is first an activity that "calls for primarily meaning-focused language use" in contrast to a traditional grammar exercise that "calls for primarily form-focused language use" (Ellis 2003:3). Second, a task requires the learners "to attain an objective", meaning that they must end up with an outcome at task completion, such as for example a list of differences when assigned a spot the difference task. To those two features, Ellis adds a third worth noting: in contrast to an exercise which spells out the language the learner must use, for a task there is no such indication and the learner must select which language to use to complete the task (Ellis 2003:9). In sum, most researchers would agree on the three following main characteristics of a task: first the activity is meaning-based; second there is a clearly defined outcome; third there is no specification of the language that participants must use (Ellis 2003:141).

### **1.1.3 The action-oriented approach/ *la perspective actionnelle***

Whereas the emergence of TBLT mainly occurred in the English-speaking countries where scholars deal with the teaching of English as a Second Language (ESL), the development of the action-oriented approach or, in French, *la perspective actionnelle*, is largely due to the work of continental researchers, in particular those dealing with the teaching of French and Spanish. Furthermore, while ESL scholars aim at re-organising the content of the notional-functional syllabus around the notion of task or at introducing into language teaching a more holistic approach congenial with SLA findings, the main goal of continental researchers is to integrate language pedagogy and the latest recommendations of the Council of Europe, published at the start of the 21st century. TBLT researchers anchor their work in applied linguistics, those taking *la perspective actionnelle* look into the pedagogical implications of political and social issues which have arisen in pluricultural societies and which are echoed in

the Council of Europe's *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment* (CEFR 2001).

The following quote from the second chapter of the document, entitled "Adopted approach", gives a "general view of language use and learning" (CEFR 2001: 9) and is widely discussed, particularly by French researchers who use the text as a springboard for reflecting on pedagogy (Ollivier 2007; Puren 2002; Rosen 2009; Springer 2009):

The approach adopted here, generally speaking, is an action-oriented one in so far as it views users and learners of a language primarily as *social agents*, i.e. members of society who have tasks (not exclusively language-related) to accomplish in a given set of circumstances, in a specific environment and within a particular field of action (CEFR 2001:9).

For the authors of the document, learners, and more generally language users, are not individuals using the language to communicate their own intended meanings as is the case for the psycholinguistic theories of SLA researchers or CLT methodologists, rather the learners are viewed as "social agents" who use the language to accomplish tasks in collaboration with other members of society within a specific social context.

For some methodologists, particularly for historians of language teaching methodologies such as Puren, the social dimension of the definition introduces a new approach to language teaching at odds with CLT (Puren 2006:37). The passage quoted above (CEFR 2001:9) implies a reshaping and reorganisation of the "coherence" of CLT which now belongs to the past while the action-oriented approach is conceptualised in response to new social needs which have emerged since the 1990s. For Puren, then, the action-oriented approach recommended by the Council of Europe is not an extension of CLT but the "latest major evolution in the history of language and culture pedagogy" (Puren 2006:37, our translation).<sup>1</sup>

This change in methodologies is occurring because there has been a historical move in "the social objective of language teaching" (*l'objectif social de référence* (Puren 2002:57)). The "social objective" refers to the "actions" the educators prepare the learners to accomplish when they leave the education system and corresponds to the needs of society at a particular moment in history. In the 1970s the "social objective" was to train learners to interact with (*parler avec*) native speakers from other European countries during brief encounters during touristic travels. Since the 1990s the "social objective" has moved to preparing learners to act with (*agir avec*) native speakers of different languages during extended periods of time of work in international organisations at home or abroad (private companies, government – or non-government bodies), or of study overseas. Whereas the "social objective" of CLT was to learn how to communicate with speakers of other monolingual nations during short visits abroad, that of the action-oriented approach is to educate learners to work and study in multilingual environments (Puren 2006:39).

The shift in "social objective" implies a change in "pedagogic task" in order to ensure the "coherence" of the approach (Puren 2002:55). For Puren, there is a "homology" between "social objective" and "pedagogic task" within the various methodologies that occurred at different moments in European history or between the "actions" the learners accomplish outside of class and the "tasks" they must perform in class (2002:55). In the case of CLT, there was a "homology" between the "social objective" to interact with foreigners and the role-play. Similarly, the action-oriented approach is developing a new "logic" to prepare the

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<sup>1</sup> All quotations from Puren given in English are our translations.

learner to work collaboratively in multicultural environments. The “pedagogic task” most consistent with the “social objective” of the approach is the project (Puren 2002:68). The project-based pedagogy, which was promoted in education in the USA at the beginning of the 20th century under the label of the “Project Method” (Kilpatrick 1918, cited in Legutke & Thomas 1991) as well as in Europe (Bordallo & Ginestet 1993), is the most appropriate to meet the social objective of the action-oriented approach because the method promotes co-operative learning through the planning and performance of “projects” involving decisions and actions carried out by the whole classroom community.

## 1.2 The implementation of the approaches and the practitioners’ perspective

After more than twenty years of research, we have reached the stage where the methodological principles of intercomprehension are clearly defined and the approach has been widely promoted in conferences and journals. Some materials are also available on-line (for example *Eurocom*). Courses designed along the principles of intercomprehension have been introduced at the university level, such as the course in intercomprehension at the University of Grenoble designed within a task-based framework (Carrasco Perea *et al.* 2008). However to our knowledge, the approach has not yet been introduced into the primary and secondary education systems in Europe. Teacher resistance might partially explain the delay: studies on teachers’ views suggest that practitioners are not all prepared to implement the approach in the classroom (Andrade & Pinho 2003; Crochot 2008; Ploquin 1997). Even though they may see value in the objectives of the approach, they prefer language programs that follow the traditional aim of developing native-like competence in the four skills of one target language. They feel they have neither the knowledge needed to compare the linguistic features of several languages nor the training required to work with students on inference strategies.

As for TBLT, the approach is the object of many criticisms not only among teachers but also from some researchers who raise doubts about the possibility of its implementation in educational contexts. These researchers criticise the approach on theoretical grounds: for them TBLT is based on unproven SLA hypotheses and, despise these shaky foundations, is being imposed from the top by SLA researchers with little experience of everyday classroom realities. In particular SLA researchers give no answer to an important question – that of finding ways to introduce and practise new linguistic items, thus providing the necessary resources to perform the task (Swan 2005). Other scholars report teachers’ “conceptual unease” about TBLT (Littlewood 2007). Teachers either do not understand the methodological tenets of the approach or are uncertain about its pedagogic value (Samuda & Bygate 2008:195). They feel more “comfortable” teaching with a “linguistic” syllabus that allows lesson planning before class and helps maintain control during class time; they find it difficult coping with the “uncertainty” of a task-based syllabus that requires dealing with linguistic problems as they arise from students’ communicative needs during task performance (Van den Branden 2006c:230).

Those negative views have surfaced in spite of intensive promotional work undertaken by TBLT supporters. Major books and articles on the theoretical foundations of the approach as well as on recommendations for its implementation have appeared in Asia, Europe and North America (Littlewood 2007; Numan 2005; Ellis 2003; Van den Branden 2006a; Samuda & Bygate 2008; Van den Branden, Bygate & Norris 2009; Willis & Willis 2007). Some journals have dedicated whole issues to the approach such as *Le français dans le monde* with its special issue on *l’apprentissage par les tâches et la perspective actionnelle* (2009) in the series *Recherches et applications*. Conferences have also promoted TBLT, such as the biennial conferences organised by the International Consortium on Task-Based

Language Teaching in England, New Zealand and North America. The promotion apparently has had some impact on publishing houses: commercial textbooks have recently appeared on the market, at least on the European market. The best example of a task-based textbook for French is *Rond Point* (Labascoule *et al.* 2004) originally published by the University of Grenoble Press, France and the Spanish company Difusión.

The chapters in *Task-Based Language Education: From Theory to Practice* give an idea of the various “challenges and practical obstacles” associated with the implementation of TBLT (Van den Branden 2006b:13). The book reports on empirical research conducted by the Centre for Language and Education at the Katholieke Universiteit of Leuven into the implementation, since the 1990s, of TBLT in Flanders’ Educational Priority Schools for the teaching of Dutch as a first and second language. Of the many issues reported, two are of interest to this special issue – first, design of a task-based syllabus and second, best approach to teacher training.

The general goal of a second language syllabus is to describe the content or *what* to teach as well as the order in which to teach it, with the view of helping teachers plan and teach lessons. While a linguistic syllabus is organised around language content, a task-based syllabus is organised around a collection of tasks. Over the past two decades, researchers have discussed at length possible ways to develop such a syllabus, usually recommending at least three steps. The first involves a needs analysis in order to identify either the actions the learners will have to accomplish outside of class (for example buying a train ticket (Long & Crooks 1992:46)) or the “domains” (for example work or study) where they will use the second language after their studies (Van Avermaet & Gysen 2006:17). From the needs analysis, a list of “target tasks” is devised (Long & Crookes 1992:47) together with the specification of the linguistic resources needed to accomplish each task (Van Avermaet & Gysen 2006:27). Once the “target tasks” have been identified, a second step involves the development of “pedagogic tasks” derived from the “target tasks” that will be incorporated into the syllabus for use in class. To incorporate the designed pedagogic tasks into the syllabus, there is a necessary third step of “grading” the “pedagogic tasks” in terms of complexity (see for example Duran & Ramaut 2006:47 on grading scales). The grading allows sequencing the tasks in the order in which they will appear in the overall syllabus or within each of its teaching units. The end product of the process is observable in textbooks. Needless to say, such a final product is the result of extended research not only into syllabus design but also into learners’ needs (Van Avermaet & Gysen 2006) and into task complexity (Robinson 2001).

Providing teachers with a task-based syllabus is a first step towards the introduction of TBLT into teaching practices. However, the research into TBLT in the Flemish education system shows that the provision of task-based materials is insufficient to ensure its adoption by teachers (Van den Branden 2006c). Here, research concluded that the implementation of TBLT, while it does involve the supply of task-based materials to teachers, also requires teacher training. As one of the most appropriate training models, they advocate “practice-based coaching” carried out by trainers who visit schools, help in classes and organise follow-up sessions with teachers (Van den Branden 2006c:235). Even though teachers did not abandon all previous classroom practices, but rather ended up combining different approaches after the coaching period, such a “practice-oriented model” encouraged them to reflect on their teaching practice. Moreover teachers appreciated the fact that the theoretical foundations of TBLT were discussed within the framework of the implementation of specific tasks in the classroom making them aware that teaching practice can be built on those foundations (Van den Branden 2006c:238). This practice-oriented model seems to suit teachers better than the more common “theoretical path” in which the teachers are first informed about a new teaching approach and are then supposed to apply the previously

learned theoretical knowledge into their classroom (Van den Branden 2006c:222). Van den Branden, however, concludes the book by emphasising that the success of such implementation very much depends on factors others than those related to teachers. In particular it involves the collaboration of all partners implicated in language education such as “syllabus developers, in-service trainers, school inspectors and educational policy makers” (Van den Branden 2006c:248).

### 1.3. Task and technology

In the previous sections, we have outlined changes in the methodological environment in which today’s learners and teachers find themselves. We have also seen Puren assert that changes in methodology can correspond to changes in the wider social reality, such as shifts in the expectations of the ways in which learners will make use of their foreign language skills. We turn now to look at another kind of change in the surrounding environment and reflect upon ways in which it can interact with language teaching: amongst the new social realities within which teachers and learners operate is that of an evolving technological environment that provides new kinds of tasks and projects. In this section, we explore how various forms of technology and the genres associated with them can lend themselves to the changed methodological imperatives outlined above.

We emphasise that technology is not presented here as a separate methodology, but rather as a set of artefacts the potential of which may be used to favour the kinds of approaches discussed earlier (particularly TBLT and the action-oriented approach, which are perhaps most relevant to the Australian situation). Therefore, in this section we are not canvassing particular language skills and how they might be developed through the use of specific technologies (see Levy 2009 for a useful overview and bibliography along those lines) but rather how major changes in the technological context in which language teaching takes place interact with the shifts in methodological focus which have been sketched above.<sup>2</sup> We suggest that in their applications beyond the classroom these technologies often already participate in cultural practices the values of which (collaboration, peer-to-peer interaction, user-built content) are shared – and this is surely no coincidence – by these latest methodological frameworks. It follows then that the technologies in which we are interested are information and communication technologies that exist outside language learning – rather than products built specifically for language training (online grammar exercises, for example).

We will discuss firstly the internet as source of information, before turning to look at Web 2.0 applications. While acknowledging issues of unequal access to technology (bandwidth in rural areas; limited equipment in some schools), the transformation of access to information which has been wrought by the introduction of the internet cannot be denied: a seemingly infinite amount of material (video, audio, print, images), of varying degrees of quality, is there online for the consulting. These vast amounts of information mean that dealing with the web as information source is not a passive role and can require of the user rather more self-direction and decision making than is involved in consulting a designated classic reference text.

In addition, around many of these sources coalesce opportunities for interaction which take us towards what is known as Web 2 – the web as a site of interaction and collaboration: it is not merely a question of using the web to “source information” (geographical facts/ dinner ideas/ pest control tips/ generic models/ examples of useful language) but also of

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<sup>2</sup> A further current in contemporary language teaching which has been much discussed in conjunction with the use of technology is that of intercultural language teaching: see for overviews Hanna & de Nooy (2009); O’Dowd (2006, 2007).



reacting to that information. Examples here would be the ample and varied opportunities for rating the quality of or providing comments on materials produced by someone else. For instance, we can mention the practices of:

- **Social bookmarking** – where users rate, rank and provide tags and descriptions of sites, sharing their “libraries” and picks with other internet users
- **Commenting on** and **rating** *YouTube* videos
- **Commenting on** and **rating** blogs and other sites of an infinite variety (recipe sites, hotel sites etc.)
- **Discussion fora** on media websites where readers can react to news stories and debate with other participants

In these examples, the user does not change the original content, but reacts to it in a way that leaves a trace in the form of some kind of commentary with which later users of the same site, in their turn, interact.

In a further step, the internet user moves from (vocal) spectator to player: the users produce the content. Here we can take up Axel Bruns’s coinage “produsage” to designate the simultaneous processes of production and use, production-as-use characteristic of open source development (see for example Bruns 2008). Examples include:

- **Question** and **Answer** sites (for example *Yahoo! Answers*; *Wordreference* discussion forums)
- The **original videos** on *YouTube*
- **Citizenship journalism**
- **Blogs**
- And of course, the example *par excellence*, **Wikipedia**

What is there in all this to interest us here in terms of the methodological shifts seen in the first section of our paper and practices of teaching? Firstly, where once, even in large urban centres, a foreign language newspaper was a rare treasure (and certainly not one which would be lightly cut up and distributed around a classroom), today’s teacher and learner have access to the web as a repository of information, a new kind of multimodal reference world for teachers and students, providing audio, video, graphic and written materials of various kinds – from ephemera to reference texts, a rich lode of information to be mined in accomplishing tasks. As Puren comments in his article in this volume, this immediacy of access allows learners to select their own materials, freeing them from dependency on teacher or textbook as source of all materials. Thus the role of the teacher shifts from provider to that of guide in handling the at times overwhelming richness of the virtual library.

Secondly, participants in language learning/ teaching are already social agents (see discussion above of the CEFR 2001:9) in a world of Web 2 technologies: amongst the repertoire of tasks they accomplish in their current languages are various forms of online interaction. Social networking, user-built systems and internet-based collaboration are for many standard tasks which they rightly would expect to be able to carry out in any additional languages learned.

This technologically-mediated world is one of multilingual spaces: we don’t have to imagine Ploquin’s French and Italian speakers crossing paths somewhere on European soil, nor anticipate a future multilingual workplace – nor do we need to go ferreting for specialist online sites of cultural exchange. On the big two, *YouTube* and *Wikipedia* multilingual discussion regularly occurs (admittedly with different levels of tolerance of other languages and incomprehension.) This means that intercomprehension reading skills correspond to everyday practice for some internet users.

These online encounters between languages offer empowerment to the multilingual

position (requests on *YouTube* for translated song lyrics; appeals on the discussion pages behind *Wikipedia* entries to equivalent articles in different languages): for learners, here is a valorisation of plurilingualism, as opposed to previous pedagogical models which basically aspired to produce serial monolinguals (native-like speakers of one language at a time).

Describing the *perspective actionnelle* in the current issue, Christian Puren writes that one of its implications is

que toute une partie de l'*exploitation* langagière et culturelle des documents se fasse à partir des productions des apprenants eux-mêmes, productions qui doivent désormais être considérés, puisque ces apprenants sont des acteurs sociaux de plein droit dans l'espace de la classe et dans leur apprentissage, comme des « documents authentiques » à part entière.

[that a large part of the linguistic and cultural exploitation of documents be based on the productions of the students themselves, productions which should henceforth be considered – because these learners are rightful social agents within the class and in their learning – as genuine “authentic documents”].

Of course, the use of learner productions as material for further pedagogical exploitation is not necessarily tied to the *approche actionnelle*, any more than the use of the CMC genres mentioned above necessarily is. However, we note that once again new technologies readily lend themselves to the approach: the internet-based learning management systems used in many educational institutions mean that student work can be securely accessed by designated groups of learners (cf Gabarre & Gabarre and Maurer in this volume). Most importantly, these learner productions can be reacted to, and the reactions themselves stored and made available through discussion forums or wikis, not peripheral, but integral to the collective production. Furthermore this kind of interaction will be familiar to many of the students from elsewhere, from practices of rating others' online posts, articles, video clips. And this leads us to a final point.

Communication technologies extend the space (Mangenot & Penilla 2009:83) within which the learner can interact with the target language, as viewer, reader, producer, indeed as “produser”, to use Brun's term. Leaving the classroom, not only can learners access the library of online information, but they can tag, rate, comment and indeed write, record, film and upload, before being in their turn tagged, rated and commented upon, not just by teachers or learner peers, but by members of the “target culture” of which they are already a part (see Ollivier (2007), Hanna & de Nooy (2009) for examples). The shift online from consultation of resources by readers to building as “produsers” resonates with a shift from P-P-P to a pedagogical approach in which process and outcome are the favoured means of classroom interaction. Tracing the evolution of the TBLT from the process approach (Candlin 1987), Mangenot and Penilla assert

Une des émanations les plus significatives de cette process approach est l'enseignement des langues piloté par les tâches (task-based language learning and teaching) où, comme dans la vie, la réalisation de la tâche et l'atteinte du résultat sont primordiales et le sens premier.

[One of the most significant products of this process approach is [...] task-based language learning and teaching [...] where, as in life, undertaking the task and achieving a result are of crucial importance] (Mangenot & Penilla 2009:83).

However, what online genres means is doing away with the qualification “as in life”: online, learner-producers are already living life in the second language. These new technology-

enabled communicative practices allow students to go beyond consuming, merely observing the online sources of the target culture: to producing, participating in collaboration both with their learner-peers and native speakers.

In a recent retrospective piece Godwin-Jones writes:

One of our challenges today as language educators is to find creative and effective ways to leverage our students' heavy investment in social networking to promote and facilitate language learning (Godwin-Jones 2010:2).

If we replace “social networking” with “communications technology” the question becomes of even greater import. Our three authors writing on technology in the current issue take up the challenge – but point to further questions: which technologies for which tasks and for which learning outcomes?

## 2. Summary of articles in the special issue

These ongoing developments in the social context of language teaching and learning and in teaching methodologies ensure opportunities for research. The contributors to the present volume provide examples of questions and approaches that might be pursued in research into teaching within language programs.

All of our authors participated in at least one of two recent Australian conferences in French, the 2008 Conference of the Federation of Associations of Teachers of French in Australia (FATFA), “Approaches to the teaching of French/Approches à l’enseignement du français” and the 2009 meeting of the Australian Society of French Studies (ASFS) “*Tekhne Technique Technologie*”.

All but the first article in this special issue are contributions to research in the implementation of methodological innovations in education. They have a practical orientation as they mostly deal with the implications of the introduction of new teaching approaches in educational systems or with the results of the use of innovative teaching materials in the classroom.

The first article, “Didactique de l’intercompréhension et enseignement du français en contexte plurilingue” argues in favour of this perspective and refines its methodological tenets. For Michel Wauthion, besides preserving linguistic diversity, the plurilingual approach has economical advantages. To introduce intercomprehension in education would not only be a gain in time, but a plurilingual capacity would also reduce the number of languages in need of translation within the institutions of the European Union. To meet the language requirements of Europe and of a global world, the author advocates a model of plurilingualism that comprises reading competence in several languages together with a native-like ability in English and in a further language. As for the methodological principles of intercomprehension, Wauthion helps the reader understand these by contrasting them with the established CLT approach. Where CLT focuses on speaking skills, and privileges immersion and communicative competence, the intercomprehension approach favours receptive skills, prioritises linguistic knowledge, and values the written language. Finally, Wauthion presents the main theoretical concepts of the method *EurocomRom* which has supplied inventories of the linguistic correspondences between the Romance languages. In his conclusion, he discusses the possibility of introducing intercomprehension in contexts other than Europe such as those where French-speakers could be trained to understand the Creole currently spoken in Vanuatu or Mauritius.

The three following articles deal with the implementation of TBLT and the action-oriented approach, respectively in textbooks, in the classroom and in the Queensland state

curriculum. In “Les manuels français de langue étrangère: entre perspective actionnelle et approche communicative”, Christian Puren examines the design of three pedagogic tasks, all placed at the end of teaching units in three textbooks published at roughly the same time (2003, 2006 and 2007). In contrast to previous research on syllabus design which discusses the process of designing tasks or syllabuses, here the author focuses on the product of task design as it appears in textbooks. This examination allows him to observe changes in the design of tasks at an historical moment of transition between CLT and *la perspective actionnelle*. As Puren’s investigation is grounded in solid criteria that help assess either the communicative elements in each activity or its emerging action-oriented components, the study illuminates the distinctive characteristics of two major tasks – namely the role-play and the project – but also the divergences between CLT and the action-oriented approach. The article also contributes to syllabus design by proposing possible models for the organisation of the teaching unit within an action-oriented framework. The second paper, “Teachers’ task implementation: a longitudinal case study”, also includes textbook analysis, but from the teachers’ perspective. Jeanne Rolin-Ianziti’s goal is to record the actions of teachers involved in the classroom implementation of two similar tasks, one at the beginning of the semester, the other at the end, both extracted from the same commercial textbook *Rond Point* (Labascoule *et al.* 2004). The implementation of the first task, which consisted mainly of following the textbook instructions, was unsuccessful in terms of students’ motivation and classroom management. Therefore, when introducing the second, the teachers pre-planned and then implemented a sequence of teaching activities in class. The second task being more successful, the article concludes that teachers play a crucial role in interpreting textbook activities, and in redesigning tasks in order to have them fit the classroom’s social and managerial requirements. Finally, the author calls for more classroom-based research on task implementation, emphasising the limited scope of her case study, the results of such studies not being generalisable to other teaching contexts. The third article on TBLT also takes the teachers’ perspective. Candice Sparks aims to analyse teachers’ reactions to the 2000 introduction of a task-based, embedded curriculum for Years 4 – 10 into Queensland schools. The study used a questionnaire to survey teachers in order to assess the extent to which they had implemented the curriculum in their courses as well as their views on it. Besides showing an uneven introduction of the curriculum, the study echoes Van den Branden’s team’s research by revealing that the success of the implementation of methodological innovations rests upon the collaboration between partners including curriculum and materials designers, teacher trainers and teachers. The lack of such a collaboration in this particular context could explain the meagre success of the implementation. Other factors however were also at play in the Queensland context: in addition to dealing with a shift to TBLT teachers also faced a move to an embedded approach (with content taken from other teaching areas) – and external factors occasioning a mismatch between the school years for which the syllabus was designed and the actual starting age for language studies.

In our final two papers, attention turns to learners as our authors include student data to investigate the introduction of two technologically-mediated projects in university settings, one in Malaysia and one in Australia.

Faced with a student cohort assigned to the French program by university administration and whose taste for the language had yet to be acquired, Cécile Gabarre and Serge Gabarre hypothesised that the way to their students’ hearts might be through their mobile phones. Leveraging the popularity of this ubiquitous form of technology, in this particular project, they exploited its capacity to build user-produced content, (other m-learning projects have exploited the mobile phone’s potential for “push”, that is for distributing information from teachers to learners: see Kennedy & Levy 2008; Gabarre & Gabarre 2009a, 2009b.) Their project therefore asked students to collaborate on multimedia

productions made accessible to the rest of the class through their course website. Then, in a requirement consistent with online practices (see above) students had to post a reaction to their peers' work. The authors report increasing engagement and motivation on the part of the students, achieved through the use of their own mobile devices to produce materials with their partners, but also through self and peer assessment – despite having been assigned to French these students were able to take charge of their own learning.

Finally, Louise Maurer's article moves away from language teaching, looking at the introduction of technologically-mediated communication, in the form of wiki-based projects, into a course on French cinema. In this course, which took an intercultural approach to its corpus and favoured intertextual comparisons, students pairs were to build multimodal wikipages dealing with their chosen topic, which would serve as the basis for final oral presentations. As in the Gabarres' project, the student productions were available for viewing by all members of class, throughout the semester, thus creating a community of users. Maurer's observations confirm others' suggestions that the wiki was less a site of discussion as a tool with which to build a final product, although the sites themselves were catalysts for valuable discussion. The student data suggest high levels of engagement. The ease of juxtaposition of video and still images lent itself to the production of the intertextual comparisons encouraged by the course. In terms of achievement of the course objectives, Maurer regrets that the ease in posting information distracted students from pursuing analytical depth of the kind modeled by her own cinematic analysis. She questions whether the wiki is in fact a tool that encourages those kinds of skills, suggesting that it is more about display than depth.

These findings remind us of an important principle: learners may be expert users of technology in other areas of their lives, but they are not specialist pedagogues. Proficiency with a technology in a social domain doesn't necessarily make a proficient user in learning contexts. It falls to the teacher to reflect on ways in which tasks may be designed to exploit technological affordances for learning gains, just as Gabarre & Gabarre, and Maurer have here.

More generally, our contributors illustrate the importance of conducting practically oriented research. Such research not only helps pedagogy through finding ways to implement new approaches in teaching; it should also inform theory. To apply Candlin and Hall's words on applied linguistics to language teaching, "there can be no good professional practice that isn't based on good research and there can be no good research that isn't informed by practice" (Candlin & Hall 2007:xv). As practitioners, language lecturers in academia are in an ideal situation to carry out research into the practical side of the profession. Firstly, in contrast to teachers in primary or secondary institutions, they operate in an environment which encourages research. Secondly, their involvement in the daily activity of teaching gives them access to valuable data which can be collected through teacher or learner surveys (see Gabarre & Gabarre, Maurer and Sparks in this issue) or through classroom observations (see Rolin-Ianziti).

In conclusion then, if as teachers we are unaware of the opportunities and possible pitfalls of new technologies and methodological approaches, we sell learners short. Research based on our teaching will improve our practice and that of others. The present volume makes a small contribution to the very necessary field of practitioner-research into teaching within language programs.

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